

# The Hegelian Logic

## The Doctrine of Being

### PRELIMINARY EXERCISES

You know, as I propose to myself to begin the actual Logic, I feel a slight chill. The Doctrine of Being. Harris, who ultimately wrote a very fine work on the Hegelian Logic, was a professor of philosophy and lecturer on Hegel at second-hand. Brockmeyer, Governor of Missouri, made a translation of the larger Logic and someone gave it to Harris. Harris says that he copied out the thing with his own hand, the whole thing, and when he was finished, he didn't understand a line, not a line. I know exactly how he felt.

What I propose to do is to use the Doctrine of Being as a means of getting practice in the style and habit of Hegel. The larger Logic is the most difficult book I know. Kant's Critique of Pure Reason is child's play compared to it. But we have to be able to handle it. So while we shall get the main points of the Doctrine of Being, look upon this as a kind of basic training, before we get down to it in the Doctrine of Essence. I am not giving a summary of the Logic. I am not expanding it as a doctrine. I am using it and showing how to begin to know it and use it.

Think of the world of human beings, nearly two billions, more than that perhaps. What is the simplest thing you can say about them? They exist. Two billion people exist. So what! To say that is to say – nothing. To say something so broad, so complete, so abstract, is to say nothing. Something must happen, must come out of this abstraction. I say: some men work. The previous abstraction has now become something. Some men work. Let us look at the men who work. They at once, by being distinguished, create another category, the people who do not work. You cannot separate one category without creating another one. To create a category is to “determine” something. But every time you determine something, you negate something. Every time. By determining men who work, we negate them as men who merely exist, but we also negate the men who do not work. They are no longer men who merely exist. That is over. They are men who do not work. Whenever you

do something, you at the same time do not do something else. A silver coin on a green table negated the green cover on the particular spot where it rests. It creates the spot where the coin is and the spot where the coin is not.

Now we have men who work. That is the quality which distinguishes them. When something “becomes” out of the mass it has a “quality”. The quality we take is work. But as you pile up the men who work, you catalogue them, work is not enough. Some are tailors, some shoemakers, some cowboys, some engineers. The list is endless. Some work well, some badly. Some work well but stay at home every morning. We soon find ourselves concerned with more than quality. We find that we must look not at quality but at quantity of work. Preoccupation with quality has led us to quantity. But quantity too is limited. The more you contemplate it, deal with it, you find that it is impossible to keep tab of the quantity of work of tailors, cooks, deep-sea divers by measuring work in the abstract. You have to get some common measure. The three divisions of the Doctrine of Being are Quality, Quantity, and Measure.

This is a crude, but in my opinion, quite adequate, example of Hegel's method. That is what I am after. Kant and the others would know and use Quality, Quantity, and Measure. What Hegel insisted upon is that these are connected, that one developed out of the other. Quantity came at a certain time because quality upon quality does not go on being quality but at a certain stage becomes something new. Hegel takes Quality and Quantity as abstractions to represent processes present in all aspects of nature, society and thought. Water is a quality, a small stream negates the surrounding land. It is a stream because it is no longer land. If it grows and grows, it becomes a river, and a number of rivers meeting in one place can become an inland sea.

Hegel's own categories are much more profound, of course. He says: think not of men, but of everything that exists, that has some “being”. Think of the whole world not as men, land, sky, horses, air, buildings. Just think of it in its capacity of existing. Pure absolute being. Good. But when you think that, you are thinking – nothing. Pure being – pure nothing. Something emerges, it “becomes” and you have “being determinate”. It has a quality. But a coin on a table negates some of the table. So that “Determinate Being” is Being-for-self but always being-for-another. Men who work are one being, being-for-self, but they are also automatically being-for-another, men-who-do-not-work. Quality means that a limit is imposed, a barrier between itself and its other.

“If we take a closer look at what a limit implies, we see it involving a contradiction in itself, and thus evincing its dialectical nature. On the one side limit makes the reality of a thing; on the other it is its negation. But,

again, the limit, as the negation of something, is not an abstract nothing but a nothing which is – what we call an “other”. Given something, and up starts an other to us: we know that there is not something only, but an other as well. Nor, again, is the other of such a nature that we can think something apart from it; a something is implicitly the other of itself, and the somewhat sees its limit become objective to it in the other. If we now ask for the difference between something and another, it turns out that they are the same: which sameness is expressed in Latin by calling the pair *aliud-aliud*. The other, as opposed to the something, is itself a something, and hence we say some other, or something else; and so on the other hand the first something when opposed to the other, also defined as something, is itself an other. When we say “something else” our first impression is that something taken separately is only something, and that the quality of being another attaches to it only from outside considerations. Thus we suppose that the moon, being something else than the sun, might very well exist without the sun. But really the moon, as a something, has its other implicit in it. Plato says: God made the world out of the nature of the “one” and the “other”: having brought these together, he formed from them a third, which is of the nature of the “one” and the “other”. In these words we have in general terms a statement of the nature of the finite, which, as something, does not meet the nature of the other as if it had no affinity to it, but, being implicitly the other of itself, thus undergoes alteration. Alteration thus exhibits the inherent contradiction which originally attaches to determinate being, and which forces it out of its own bounds.

“... But the fact is, mutability lies in the notion of existence, and change is only the manifestation of what it implicitly is. The living die, simply because as living they bear in themselves the germ of death.”

That is the core of the Doctrine of Being. Something immediately involves something else. Continue with something like quality, and its other, quantity, will take form. A completely abstract something is the same as nothing, that is its other. Something “Becomes” out of nothing. It always has its limit, its barrier. And this limit, barrier, is burst through, at a certain stage, to establish the other, its other. All this takes place in the sphere of determinate being, simple quality.

Let me take an example of what the method of the Logic signifies. The proletariat politically is an undistinguished body of proletarians. Something “becomes”. Some of them form a party. At once the proletariat is no longer party and proletarians. It is party and non-party, or as we say, party and mass. The party creates its other, the mass. But you can have one, two, three, four parties. One obvious way to

distinguish is by size. That is not sufficient, however. For political purposes we can judge by "support", a form of quantity. But support changes. Out of support we can arrive at what in the last analysis decided support – policy. That is a form of Measure. Whenever you examine any object, you can begin by looking for its obvious distinguishing quality, the quantity of this quality, and the measure of it.

Bit by bit we go a step further, like an experienced man bringing along a virgin who has willingly consented. Grace is probably tearing her hair at the vulgarity of some of my illustrations. They are better than the perpetual water turning into steam which everybody uses from Engels. But I don't want to leave it there. For us Doctrine of Being is a road to practise to get familiar with the method, the concrete method, the method of dealing with Hegel's matter and manner. Do not be misled by the extract I have given you from the smaller Logic. There he is being friendly, considerate and kind. In the larger Logic he is ruthless. He puts down the most difficult, complicated idea in a clause of three words. He creates terms, three, four, five, and uses them as if they were letters of the alphabet. So let us use this interlude as training. Now for this quality into quantity business. Hegel uses the One and the Many as his illustration.

Common sense thinks one is one, and over here, and many is some, and over there. In other words. One has a special quality, and they begin there and stay there. Hegel says No. Philosophy tells us that One presupposes Many. The moment I say One, I have thereby created the category Many. In fact it is the existence of the Many which makes the One possible at all. If there were no Many, One would be whatever you wish but it would not be One meaning this one, in contrast with many others. The One therefore is repellent. To be, it repels the Many. It is exclusive, but it is not quiescent. It is actively repelling the Many, for otherwise its specific quality as One would be lost. This is Repulsion. But, all the other Ones who constitute the Many have a connecting relation with it. They thereby have a connective relation with each other; the One, by holding them all off, makes them all join together against it. But each of these is a One, too. Thus the One begins by Repulsion but creates in every other single One an attraction. Thus, the One when you begin with it is a Quality, but by examining first and following what is involved to the end, you turn up with a new category, Quantity, with the original pure and simple Quality suppressed and superseded.

Here is the complete extract:

"The One, as already remarked, just is self-exclusion and explicit putting itself as the Many. Each of the Many however is itself a One, and in virtue of its so behaving, this all rounded repulsion is by one stroke converted into its opposite – Attraction."

The thing that Hegel insists upon is not to see the One as fixed, finite, limited, isolated. It is One because there are Many, and because of that the original category of One begins to assume new facets and suddenly they are the very opposite of what you began with. As Hegel knows and says you can (if you want to) make a lot of jokes about these transitions. His fundamental answer is that you have to go along with him and see where you get and what you get. Anyone who has had a class on Capital knows that there are certain types who passionately contest every sentence, every deduction. In the end they always turn up in the bourgeois camp. It is the revolution they are fighting. The Hegelian categories offer infinite opportunity for this. We, however, not only have our past traditions. We have had a very substantial introduction here, and can afford to follow him. As a matter of fact, few people challenge the broad divisions of the Doctrine of Being. I have seen these basic premises challenged, but the writer said that if you admitted those, you could not seriously oppose him after.

Now let Hegel himself speak. I give some lengthy extracts from the smaller Logic.

“The transition from Quality to Quantity, indicated in the paragraph before us, is not found in our ordinary way of thinking which deems each of these categories to exist independently beside the other. We are in the habit of saying that things are not merely qualitatively, but also quantitatively defined; but whence these categories originate, and how they are related to each other, are questions not further examined. The fact is, quantity just means quality superseded and absorbed: and it is by the dialectic of quality here examined that this supersession is effected. First of all, we had being: as the truth of Being, came Becoming: which formed the passage to Being Determinate: and the truth of that we found to be Alteration. And in its result Alteration showed itself to be Being-for-self, exempt from implication of another and from passage into another; which Being-for-self finally in the two sides of its process, Repulsion and Attraction, was clearly seen to annul itself, and thereby to annul quality in the totality of its stages. Still this superseded and absorbed quality is neither an abstract nothing, nor an equally abstract and featureless being: it is only being as indifferent to determinateness or character. This aspect of being is also what appears as quantity in our ordinary conceptions. We observe things, first of all, with an eye to their quality – which we take to be the character identical with the being of the thing. If we proceed to consider their quantity, we get the conception of an indifferent and external character or mode, of such a kind that a thing remains what it is though its quantity is altered, and the thing becomes greater or less.”

Then he works through Quantity and arrives at Measure. These he sums up so far:

“Thus quantity by means of the dialectical movement so far studied through its several stages, turns out to be a return to quality. The first notion of quantity presented to us was that of quality abrogated and absorbed. That is to say, quantity seemed an external character not identical with Being, to which it is quite immaterial. This notion, as we have seen, underlies the mathematical definition of magnitude as what can be increased or diminished. At first sight this definition may create the impression that quantity is merely whatever can be altered – increase and diminution alike implying determination of magnitude otherwise – and may tend to confuse it with determinate Being, the second stage of quality, which in its notion is similarly conceived as alterable. We can, however, complete the definition by adding, that in quantity we have an alterable, which in spite of alterations still remains the same. The notion of quantity, it thus turns out, implies an inherent contradiction. This contradiction is what forms the dialectic of quantity. The result of the dialectic however is not a mere return to quality, as if that were the true and quantity the false notion, but an advance to the unity and truth of both, to qualitative quantity, or Measure.”

This is worth pondering over, it is not too difficult. There Hegel says something which he often repeats, as I have shown before. Men it seems could be as stupid then as now. He is talking about Nature where simple determinate being, quality, abounds. Measure is a very low stage of the dialectical logic. And Hegel says:

“It may be well therefore at this point to observe that whenever in our study of the objective world we are engaged in quantitative determinations, it is in all cases Measure which we have in view, as the goal of our operations. This is hinted at even in language, when the ascertainment of quantitative features and relations is called measuring.”

Now come two splendid examples of the dialectical relation between quality, quantity, and measure:

“We measure, e.g. the length of different chords that have been put into a state of vibration, with an eye to the qualitative difference of the tones caused by their vibration, corresponding to this difference of length. Similarly, in chemistry, we try to ascertain the quantity of the matters brought into combination, in order to find out the measures or proportions conditioning such combination, that is to say, those quantities which give rise to definite qualities.”

Then comes a really superb passage in which you see what the Logic meant to him and how he used it. It is very long. But this is in its way an anthology and I would like it in:

“The identity between quantity and quality, which is found in Measure, is at first only implicit, and not yet explicitly realised. In other words, these two categories, which unite in Measure, each claim an independent authority. On the one hand, the quantitative features of existence may be altered, without affecting its quality. On the other hand, this increase and diminution, immaterial though it be, has its limit, by exceeding which the quality suffers change. Thus the temperature of water is, in the first place, a point of no consequence in respect of its liquidity: still with the increase of diminution of the temperature of the liquid water, there comes a point where this state of cohesion suffers a qualitative change, and the water is converted into steam or ice. A quantitative change takes place, apparently without any further significance: but there is something lurking behind, and a seemingly innocent change of quantity acts as a kind of snare, to catch hold of the quality. The antinomy of Measure which this implies was exemplified under more than one garb among the Greeks. It was asked, for example, whether a single grain makes a heap of wheat, or whether it makes a bald-tail to tear out a single hair from the horse's tail. At first, no doubt, looking at the nature of quantity as an indifferent and external character of being, we are disposed to answer these questions in the negative. And yet, as we must admit, this indifferent increase and diminution has its limit: a point is finally reached, where a single additional grain makes a heap of wheat; and the bald-tail is produced, if we continue plucking out single hairs. These examples find a parallel in the story of the peasant who, as his ass trudged cheerfully along, went on adding ounce after ounce to its load, till at length it sunk under the unendurable burden. It would be a mistake to treat these examples as pedantic futility; they really turn on thoughts, an acquaintance with which is of great importance in practical life, especially in ethics. Thus in the matter of expenditure, there is a certain latitude within which a more or less does not matter; but when the Measure, imposed by the individual circumstances of the special case, is exceeded on the one side or the other, the qualitative nature of Measure (as in the above examples of the different temperature of water) makes itself felt, and a course, which a moment before was held good economy, turns into avarice or prodigality. The same principles may be applied in politics, when the constitution of a state has to be looked at as independent of, no less than as dependent on, the extent of its territory, the number of its inhabitants, and other

quantitative points of the same kind. If we look, e.g. at a state with a territory of ten thousand square miles and a population of four millions we should, without hesitation, admit that a few square miles of land or a few thousand inhabitants more or less could exercise no essential influence on the character of its constitution. But on the other hand, we must not forget that by the continual increase or diminishing of a state, we finally get to a point where, apart from all other circumstances, this quantitative alteration alone necessarily draws with it an alteration in the quality of the constitution. The constitution of a little Swiss canton does not suit a great kingdom; and, similarly, the constitution of the Roman republic was unsuitable when transferred to the small imperial towns of Germany.”

That is about all we need.

Now for a little recapitulation and a jumping-off place into Essence. Being means quality, determinate being. It comes out of Nothing. It deals with the categories of other determinate beings that one determinate being automatically creates. But Measure as the last stage of such Being which creates other over there. The dialectic of Measure leads it into Essence, where being is no longer simply determinate. It is reflected. We now begin to see an object whose parts are separated by thought. One part creates an other, true, but the other is inherent in the object itself, not one object here and another over there, but the object splits into related categories that are both contained within the object itself.

This has been very quiet, very easy. The smaller Logic is worth reading on the Doctrine of Being in particular. I have purposely kept the pitch low. Just read and get acquainted. For after this we are going to begin to go places and it is going to be hectic.

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